

Correspondence

Memorial to Professor E. H. Kettle

SIR.—By the death of Edgar Hartley Kettle in December last pathology, in this country, lost one of its most distinguished exponents, and all who knew him were deprived of a personal friend. We feel sure that those who were associated with him, as colleagues or students in his professional work, or in any other of the activities in which he took part, would desire that his memory should be perpetuated in some suitable form.

Kettle's devotion to his subject, and to all that concerned it, including particularly the interests of his students and younger colleagues, was evidenced throughout his professional career. As an original worker, as a director who stimulated the work of others, as a teacher, as a senior member and treasurer of the Pathological Society, and as an active member of numerous committees he played a part that will not be forgotten. In each of the four University schools in which he directed the teaching of pathology—St. Mary's, Welsh National School of Medicine, St. Bartholomew's, and the British Post-Graduate Medical School—he won the admiration and affection of his colleagues and his students. We feel that a fitting tribute to his memory would be the foundation of a Kettle Memorial Lectureship in Pathology, and that this lecture might appropriately be given annually, in each of these schools in turn.

An endowment fund is being collected for this purpose, and we are sure that his colleagues and friends, including many who, though not pathologists, were associated with him in connexion with his pioneer work on silicosis, or in other ways, would wish to be given the opportunity of contributing. It is suggested that individual contributions should not, in most cases, be more than two guineas, and smaller sums will be welcomed.

Contributions should be sent to the Treasurer, Kettle Memorial Fund, British Post-Graduate Medical School, Ducane Road, W.12. Cheques should be drawn in favour of the "Kettle Memorial Fund" and crossed "Barclay and Co."—We are, etc.,

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Prevention of Constipation

SIR.—Correspondents in the *Journal* have recently urged the importance of establishing a bureau of geographical medicine. Such statements as "Chinese of the upper classes do not suffer from high blood pressure" would come under its investigations. Dr. E. M. Dimock, in his article on the prevention of constipation (*Journal*, May 1, p. 906), states that "constipation is practically unknown among savage tribes." Dr. Dimock's article contains much sage medicine and also much sage psychology, which is, as he points out, of great importance in the treatment of constipation. I am not criticizing his article, but as

a rider to it may I point out certain lessons which can be deduced from the sentence quoted?

Is it correct that savage tribes do not suffer from constipation? Messrs. Parke, Davis and Co. first discovered cascara sagrada by hearing of a drug in use for constipation among the North American Indians. But it may be reasonably correct to say that in warmer climates savage tribes do not often come to medical officers for treatment for constipation. Is it possible that they find that much of what we call constipation can conveniently be left alone? The lay members of a civilized population label as constipation any habit of the bowels which does not involve at least one daily motion. Some healthy persons have two motions daily. In general they tend to be proud of this cycle; it appears to give them a sense of superiority, and few would think of taking medicine to reduce this frequency. But some individuals have their maximum of health with four or five motions a week and no aperients.

Such persons in war-time would largely be classified as B or possibly C, but in civilian life they are efficient members of the State. As such individuals pass into adult life they begin to flog their alimentary tract with aperients to attain the intestinal activity which they believe will in itself give them perfect health. They are at their worst when they take an aperient which fails to act, and at their next worst when they force their bowels into two or three loose motions daily. They are at their best with no aperients even if they pass only four or five motions a week. But the psychological aspect must be borne in mind and the inferiority complex associated with their so-called "constipation" must be allayed.

Bran meets both the necessary conditions. It dispenses with aperients and soothes the mental anxiety. Personally I prefer physical exercises for most cases, and there are also other varieties of treatment which can be applied to individual conditions, but the principle that a reasonable degree of "constipation" gives such persons the maximum comfort and health is the same.

I have found on several occasions that when these persons have attained a satisfactory routine and are rejoicing in the sensation of good health, they are under the impression that the bowels are being opened daily, whereas a careful record shows about five motions a week. They can usually be persuaded to leave well alone.—I am, etc.,

London, W.1, May 20.

H. LETHEBY TIDY.

SIR,—No one who has been in active general practice for as many years as I have can fail to have come to certain conclusions about constipation, its cause, prevention, and rational treatment. My own experience has led me to agree much more whole-heartedly with the "old-fashioned" doctors who regarded the prompt evacuation of the bowels as, nine times out of ten, one of the first therapeutic measures to be taken in treating illness of almost every kind than with the apostles of the newer school who pooh-pooh constipation either as entirely normal and desirable or as of no particular importance.

Dr. Dimock's article in your issue of May 1 (p. 906) interested me, and to a large extent my experience confirms his conclusions. But some of his remarks seem to me to betray a good deal either of prejudice or of unawareness. Dr. Dimock says that "as constipation is practically unknown among savage tribes it would appear that a method is required which will overcome the disadvantages of our civilized diets and sedentary occupations." We can all "overcome the disadvantages of our civilized diets" to some extent by including in them a